

A Diachronic Study on the Integration of Chinese Culture into College English Textbooks: Evolution, Challenges, and Future Pathways

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Fund: This paper is funded by the URT (Undergraduate Research Training) program of the Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technology, and the number is 2025J00235.

Article Detail:	Abstract
<i>Received: 18 Sep 2025;</i> <i>Received in revised form: 15 Oct 2025;</i> <i>Accepted: 19 Oct 2025;</i> <i>Available online: 24 Oct 2025</i> ©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Keywords— College English textbooks; Chinese culture; diachronic research; cultural confidence; ideological and political education in curriculum	<i>This study employs a diachronic research methodology to systematically analyze the integration characteristics and developmental trends of "Chinese cultural content" in university English textbooks across four distinct periods from 1980 to 2020. By examining four representative textbook series from major domestic publishers – including "College English" and "21st Century College English" – the research reveals a progressive evolution in the presentation of Chinese culture, progressing from initial absence and exploratory attempts to deepened development and systematic integration. In recent years, guided by the "curriculum-based ideological education" concept and driven by cultural confidence strategies, textbook compilation has increasingly emphasized systematic integration of Chinese cultural elements and the cultivation of cross-cultural communication competencies. The study proposes that future textbooks should achieve more balanced representation of Chinese and Western cultural content, while fully leveraging digital technologies to enhance cultural education, thereby better cultivating interdisciplinary talents with global perspectives and cultural confidence.</i>

I. INTRODUCTION

With the accelerating pace of globalization, the importance of language education in cross-cultural communication has become increasingly prominent. As a core public foundation subject in higher

education, College English serves as a compulsory course for all undergraduates throughout their undergraduate studies. The curriculum covers knowledge spanning all academic disciplines in universities. This distinctive feature enables College

English to play a more significant role in promoting China's outstanding traditional culture [1].

In recent years, with the deepening implementation of the "Going Global of Chinese Culture" strategy and the advancement of "Ideological and Political Education in Curriculum", the integration of Chinese cultural elements into college English textbooks has become a significant research focus in foreign language education. However, existing studies predominantly concentrate on specific historical periods or individual textbook analyses, lacking systematic diachronic examinations. This study aims to systematically explore the integration, evolutionary trajectory, and development trends of Chinese culture in textbooks through diachronic analysis of English teaching materials across different periods, providing valuable references for future textbook development and pedagogical practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, research on cultural content in college English textbooks has gradually increased. Liu Chenyan and Li Yuan (2025) found through CiteSpace's visual analysis of CNKI core journal literature from 2003 to 2023 that English textbook research is mainly concentrated in three clusters: "English teaching", "college English", and "English textbooks". However, research clusters centered on culture have not yet formed, indicating that this field is still in its developmental stage. Tang Xinhuan (2025) and others, from the perspective of cultural security, pointed out that current college English textbooks have issues such as "imbalance in the proportion of Chinese and Western cultural elements and the absence of China elements".

In practical education practice, Liu Fang (2025) pioneered an innovative "cultural integration + technology empowerment" language teaching model. Through comparative analysis of translated Chinese and Western classical texts, this approach has significantly enhanced students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. Guo Baoxian (2024), in her monograph "Design and Application of

Chinese Cultural Content in English Teaching Materials", systematically examined core issues in curriculum design and utilization of Chinese cultural elements. The study emphasized the holistic approach to cultivating cross-cultural communication competence through Chinese cultural content in English textbooks.

While these studies have provided valuable insights, there remains a lack of systematic diachronic research on the integration of Chinese culture into college English textbooks. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting longitudinal analyses of textbooks across different periods, revealing the dynamic patterns of cultural integration.

III. THEORETICAL BASIS

3.1 Cultural transfer theory

American linguist Robert Lado first introduced the phenomenon of language transfer in his seminal work *Cross-Cultural Linguistics*. He observed: "Language learners tend to transfer the structures, forms, and meanings of their native language and culture into foreign linguistic environments[2]. Cross-cultural communication involves language transfer that extends beyond traditional studies of native language influence. It encompasses how communicators' existing linguistic knowledge affects their comprehension, creation, and application of target language information[3]. Therefore, language education should incorporate rich cultural content, providing a theoretical foundation for integrating Chinese cultural elements into college English curricula."

3.2 Cross-cultural communication theory

Intercultural communication primarily investigates the unique relationship between cultural contexts and human interaction, particularly how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds exchange ideas, emotions, and information to enhance intercultural competence[4]. University English education should emphasize cultivating students' intercultural communication skills, enabling them to confidently showcase their native culture in globalized exchanges.

This theoretical framework provides guidance for presenting Chinese cultural content in teaching materials.

3.3 Ideological and political education in courses

The ideological and political education in curriculum philosophy emphasizes integrating the fundamental mission of moral cultivation into every aspect of foreign language classroom teaching. This approach transforms the educational process from merely imparting language skills to creating a platform for nurturing students' social responsibility, historical mission, and cultural confidence. Such principles provide policy support and implementation pathways for deeply embedding Chinese cultural content into textbooks.

3.4 Cultural stratification theory

The theory of cultural stratification posits that culture can be divided into three dimensions: material, institutional, and spiritual. Rather than being a homogeneous whole, culture consists of distinct levels that are both independent and interconnected^[5]. This framework provides a systematic approach for categorizing and analyzing Chinese cultural elements in educational materials, enabling comprehensive evaluation of the depth and breadth of cultural integration within these resources.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employs literature analysis and content analysis methods, carefully selecting four sets of college English textbooks published by major domestic publishers across four distinct periods (from the 1980s to the 2020s) as research subjects. It focuses on analyzing the Chinese cultural elements embedded in the textbook content, exercise designs, and supplementary materials.

The analytical framework of the study is based on the theory of cultural stratification, which divides the cultural content in the teaching materials into three levels:

1) Material culture: visible cultural elements such as food, clothing, architecture and works of art;

2) Institutional culture: including festival customs, social norms, family ethics and other aspects of social institutions;

3) Spiritual culture: referring to the spiritual culture such as philosophical thought, value concept and aesthetic orientation.

Through manual coding and statistical analysis, this study conducted a classification and historical comparison of Chinese cultural content in textbooks, aiming to reveal its characteristics and developmental trends across different eras. Meanwhile, by integrating relevant policy documents and teaching syllabi, the changes in textbook content were examined within the broader sociocultural context.

V. FINDINGS

5.1 Analysis of characteristics in different periods

5.1.1 Early stage (1980s to early 2000s)

During this period, university English textbooks predominantly featured Western cultural content while offering relatively limited coverage of Chinese culture. The compilation process primarily focused on imparting linguistic knowledge and practical skills, with cultural elements being presented in a secondary manner. When Chinese cultural content was included, it was often conveyed implicitly, such as through cultural elements embedded in translation exercises. At that time, the primary objective of China's foreign language education was to develop students' language proficiency to meet basic communication needs. Meanwhile, there was insufficient recognition of cultural instruction's importance in language learning, and textbook development concepts had not fully acknowledged the value of integrating cultural elements.

5.1.2 Development phase (early 2000s to early 2010s)

With the increase of China's foreign exchanges and the gradual enhancement of cultural confidence, university English textbooks have begun to incorporate some Chinese cultural content. A small amount of content introducing China's traditional culture and customs has started to appear in the

textbooks, but overall, Chinese cultural content is still mainly presented implicitly, such as through translation and word selection exercises. In the initial stage, at the beginning of the 21st century, China actively strengthened close ties with countries around the world, engaged in comprehensive foreign exchanges and cooperation, conducted cultural exchange activities, and enhanced the visibility of Chinese culture. English textbooks also followed the

national development strategy and emerged with research on Chinese cultural content^[6]. On one hand, China's influence on the international stage has gradually increased, and it has begun to reflect its own culture in textbooks; on the other hand, the foreign language education community has begun to recognize the importance of cultural teaching, but specific teaching concepts and methods are still being explored.

Table 1: Presentation characteristics of Chinese cultural content in college English teaching materials at different stages

Presentation format	Proportion	Typical examples	Limitations
translation exercise	65%	Chinese idioms and proverbs in Chinese-English translation	Lack of cultural context and depth of interpretation
gap filling	20%	Words related to Chinese festivals and customs	Cultural information is fragmented and lacks systematization
reading comprehension	10%	A short essay introducing the scenic spots and historic sites of China	Focus on knowledge, lack of cultural depth
listening material	5%	A dialogue containing China elements	The content is random and lacks design

5.1.3 Deepening phase (early 2010s to early 2020s)

University English textbooks have significantly enhanced both the content and presentation methods of Chinese cultural elements. These materials now feature explicit cultural elements through dedicated units or articles, while also fostering cultural confidence by comparing Chinese and foreign cultures. The coverage has expanded to include modern, traditional, and revolutionary cultural aspects, offering a comprehensive exploration of China's cultural heritage.

The Chinese government has been steadily increasing its emphasis on cultural education. Policy documents such as the *Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020 Edition)* explicitly require cultivating students' ability to use foreign languages to promote Chinese culture. Moreover, with the advancement of globalization, developing intercultural communication skills has become a key objective in foreign language education. This trend has driven textbook developers to place

greater emphasis on integrating Chinese cultural elements into language instruction.

5.1.4 Current phase (early 2020s to date)

Under the guidance of national policies, such as the release of the *Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Courses*, university English textbooks have been more systematic in integrating Chinese culture. The textbooks not only focus on presenting Chinese culture but also emphasize cultivating students' values and cultural confidence through cultural education. At the same time, the compilation philosophy of the textbooks places greater emphasis on the organic combination of culture and language, enhancing students' intercultural communication skills through various methods such as cultural experience activities and cross-cultural comparisons. For example, in the series of *New Progressive College English Integrated Coursebook*, for each unit, a passage with Chinese features about the unit theme is

presented, with more detailed materials appearing in their electronic version textbooks. Centering on the same topic, situations in other countries are presented in comparison with those of China, so that students would gain wider scope of knowledge in this field, acquire a more objective view of the problems, enrich their cultural experience and enhance their cross-cultural competencies.

In the context of globalization, cultural confidence has become a key indicator to measure national soft power. As an important way of cultural inheritance and communication, foreign language teaching undertakes the responsibility of cultivating versatile talents with international vision and profound cultural heritage.

Table 2: Innovative Practices of Integrating Chinese Culture into College English Textbooks at the Current Stage

Innovative orientation	Typical Representative	Main features	Teaching efficiency
Empowerment through digital technology	Construction of financial English teaching materials	Promote the digital transformation and interdisciplinary integration of financial English teaching	Increase teaching interest and enhance cultural experience
AIGC applied technology	Exploring pathways for integrating AIGC into Chinese culture	Artificial intelligence-generated content technology can enhance the effectiveness of cultural teaching	Personalized learning, real-time cultural interaction
Reconstructing bilingual classrooms	"CREATE" model-driven bilingual classroom restructuring	Exploring new models of bilingual teaching and cognitive enhancement paths	Promote cognitive leaps and improve cross-cultural competence
Blended teaching	Online MOOC and offline textbook synchronous learning	Adopt the way of synchronous learning of online MOOC and offline teaching materials	Expand learning space and strengthen cultural practice

5.2 Development trend analysis

From the early stage of western culture, to the gradual integration of Chinese culture, and then to the systematic integration of Chinese culture and the organic combination of culture and language, the integration of Chinese culture in college English teaching materials shows obvious characteristics of stage evolution. Specifically, it is manifested as follows:

1) From implicit to explicit: Chinese culture has developed from the initial accidental and implicit

presentation to conscious and systematic explicit content design;

2) From single to multiple: the cultural content has expanded from the initial focus on traditional cultural elements to a multi-dimensional content system including traditional culture, modern culture and revolutionary culture;

3) From knowledge to ability: cultural teaching from the simple transmission of cultural knowledge to the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability;

4) From one-way to two-way: from simply introducing western culture to two-way

communication of cultural comparison and mutual learning between China and the West;

5) From traditional to digital: Cultural presentation mode has developed from traditional text-based to multimodal experience integrating VR, AIGC and other digital technologies.

In the future, with the further attention of the country to culture and education, the content of Chinese culture in teaching materials will be more abundant and systematic, and the teaching methods will be more diversified, so as to better cultivate students' intercultural communication ability and cultural confidence.

VI. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Suggestions for the design of teaching materials

6.1.1 Enhancing the systematicness and diversity of Chinese cultural content

Textbook writers should introduce more units or articles related to Chinese culture in textbooks, covering aspects such as modern culture, traditional culture, and revolutionary culture, to form a diversified yet unified cultural content system; emphasize the hierarchy and coherence of cultural content, gradually deepening from material culture to spiritual culture. The *Understanding the New Era China* series of textbooks for Higher Education Institutions-College English Reading Course breaks the limitation of disconnectedness between reading content and practical content, focusing on the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and values, and highlighting the role of cultural immersion in shaping students' values and ideological qualities^[7].

6.1.2 Balancing the proportions of Chinese and western cultures

Textbook writers should reasonably adjust the proportion of Chinese and Western cultural content in textbooks to avoid excessive bias towards one culture, thereby achieving cultural diversity and coexistence. It is recommended to adopt a two-way cultural integration teaching model, introducing

corresponding Chinese cultural content alongside Western cultural elements to facilitate cultural comparison and mutual learning.

6.1.3 Innovative cultural presentation methods

The case studies in textbooks lack sufficient integration with the practical realities and professional characteristics of independent college students. Moreover, teachers have not timely supplemented more suitable cases to address this deficiency, resulting in low student engagement^[8]. Therefore, we should replace the traditional single-text presentation approach with multimodal design that combines text, images, audio, and video to enhance the intuitiveness and appeal of cultural communication. Particularly, we should fully utilize digital technologies (such as VR, AR, and AI-generated content) to create immersive cultural scenarios, thereby elevating students' learning experiences.

6.2 Teaching practice recommendations

6.2.1 Strengthening cross-cultural comparative perspectives

In the teaching process, strive to present the rich and diverse Chinese culture more evenly, incorporating cultural references and knowledge modules, and combining richer forms of cultural presentation with content^[9]. Guide students to conduct comparative analysis of Chinese and Western cultures, such as through the comparison of "Aristotle's Three-Part Argument on Friendship" and "The Three Beneficial Friends" in *The Analects*, to deepen their understanding of cultural differences and cultivate cultural critical thinking.

6.2.2 Deepening the integration of ideological and political education in curriculum

Teachers should help students understand the background and impact of China's high-quality development philosophy, guide them to comprehend the development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and inclusiveness, with particular emphasis on the role of innovation in the development process^[10]. Integrate the concept of moral education and talent cultivation organically

into all aspects of foreign language classroom teaching, explore ideological and political elements in Chinese culture, and transform the teaching process into a platform for nurturing students' cultural confidence and values.

6.2.3 Expanding extracurricular cultural practices

Encourage students to participate in practical activities such as "telling China's stories in English," transforming cultural knowledge from textbooks into cross-cultural communication skills, and achieving a leap from language learning to cultural dissemination. For example, the textbook's "Belt and Road" initiative theme module can be leveraged to build an interdisciplinary project called "Silk Road Cultural Archaeology." Students simulate multinational joint archaeological teams, integrating historical land Silk Road route maps from textbooks, climate zone distribution data from geography textbooks, and the English interpretation of "Hu Shang Tu" (Hu Shang Tu) in Dunhuang murals, while accessing 3D models of Silk Road sites through the UNESCO Virtual Museum^[11].

VII. CONCLUSION

Through a diachronic analysis of college English textbooks across different periods, this study reveals the integration and evolving trends of Chinese cultural elements in educational materials. The research demonstrates that the representation of Chinese culture in these textbooks has undergone a developmental process—from initial absence and exploratory attempts to systematic integration and deepening. In recent years, driven by the curriculum's ideological-political education philosophy and the national strategy of cultural confidence, significant progress has been achieved in this field.

Future textbook development should emphasize the organic integration of culture and language, fostering students' cross-cultural communication skills and cultural confidence through diverse content, varied methodologies, and digital technologies. Meanwhile, educators must innovate teaching approaches by transforming cultural knowledge transmission into

cultural competence cultivation, thereby providing robust support for nurturing interdisciplinary talents with global perspectives and cultural literacy.

This study has certain limitations, such as the limited number of sample textbooks and the need to expand analytical dimensions. Future research could broaden the sample scope, incorporate quantitative analysis methods, and delve deeper into how cultural content in teaching materials actually impacts students' cultural identity. These efforts would provide a more solid empirical foundation for developing university English textbooks.

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